

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 008461

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL EAID IZ FR

SUBJECT: NON-COMMITTAL GoF RESPONSE ON WELCOMING IRAQI ELECTIONS, INCREASING ASSISTANCE

REF: A. STATE 223612

1B. STATE 220728

1C. PARIS 8441

1D. PARIS 8171

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary and comment: The GoF and local Iraqi embassy have no public events planned in conjunction with Iraq's December 15 elections. GoF officials stress that the GoF will wait and see how the elections unfold, paying particular attention to voter participation levels, before pronouncing on the issue. GoF officials remain evasive on the question of increased French assistance to Iraq and continue to highlight existing French assistance. The Iraqi embassy, meanwhile, plans to close until December 19 so that mission staff can participate in out-of-country voting outside France. End summary and comment.

12. (C) Poloffs discussed ref a and b points with MFA DAS-equivalent for Iraq/Iran/Arabian Gulf Affairs Antoine Sivan and DAS-equivalent for NATO Nicolas Niemtchinow, urging a positive public GoF response to Iraq's December 15 elections and stressing U.S. hope that France will significantly increase its assistance to Iraq after this historic vote. Sivan responded to the first point, without addressing the latter question of new assistance. He stressed that GoF had no public events planned and would await the outcome of the December 15 vote before pronouncing on the issue. The GoF hoped the elections would be marked by high voter participation rates among all communities, and that voting would take place in as "correct" a manner as possible. Sivan took on board the suggestion of a call to ITG President Talabani (ref a), but commented that such a call would depart from traditional GoF practice, which would be to congratulate the top officials (President and PM) of Iraq's new government, once it is formed. Sivan also stressed that while the December 15 election was an important step, it was not the last step in Iraq's political process.

13. (C) Iraqi Ambassador to France Mouwafak Abboud informed us December 14 that his embassy would be closing later in the day and reopen on December 19, to give Iraqi staff the opportunity to vote outside France. Abboud explained that he felt compelled to give his staff the chance to vote, after "being denied this right for 40 years." Abboud welcomed news of our approaches to the GoF, and reiterated that after December 15 elections, the GoF would have no excuse not to engage further in Iraq. Abboud confirmed his mission had no public events planned this week, but added that his embassy had briefed French media on electoral prospects earlier this week and planned further media outreach, including op-eds, in coming weeks. He concluded, however, that it remained an uphill battle to convince French media to focus on positive aspects of Iraq's political transition.

14. (C) Comment: While the GoF has recently taken a more constructive public line on Iraq, stressing the downside of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal and shared international interest in ensuring success in Iraq, this has not translated into new assistance offers. In all of our recent approaches to the GoF on assistance issues, including last week's visit by Deputy Senior Iraq Coordinator Deutsch (ref c), GoF officials have sought to play up existing French offers (such as Paris Club debt relief and the French contribution to EU Iraq funds) while remaining evasive on the subject of new aid. End comment.

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